

**A Review of
"The Socioeconomic Benefits Generated
by 15 Community College Districts in Iowa"**

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We have reviewed the community college impact study and found that the estimated return to individuals from higher education is well established and accepted. In attempting to measure the public and social benefits from additional education, and community college education in particular, the approach in this study is very innovative, and at times very heroic. **While the authors (M. Henry Robison & Kjell A. Christophersen) pointed out the substantial benefits which the community colleges in Iowa offer to the State, they have also overlooked many other obvious benefits offered by the community colleges in Iowa.**

For instance, most of the institutions serve as the regional hub for economic development planning. They provide business-partnering programs for their communities. They are the local center for entrepreneurial and leadership promotion, sponsoring conferences and offering continuing education opportunities.

They also provide a venue for entertainment, sports and cultural events and performing arts activities for their region and they provide lifelong placement services to their students and graduates. **These functions have a substantial financial and social benefit to the state and their values would enhance what the authors of this study have already quantified.**

The methodology appears to be sound and while we have several instances where our measures vary slightly with those of the authors, we believe the authors substantially understated the benefits by using an overstated estimate of the number of past students who have left Iowa. The authors incorporated into their modeling an assumption that 38% of past community college students have left the State. The Iowa College Student Aid Commission reports indicate that the number is more like 16.9%. If the authors of the study had used a 16.9% attrition rate assumption instead of the 38%, the results would have more than doubled the economic development benefits of the community colleges.

We externally verified the other assumptions and the modeling methodology and found them to be fundamentally sound. Our review of previous studies of the economic impacts of colleges and the literature on the private and public returns to investment in higher education suggests that the authors, for the most part, have followed standard, well-established procedures and their conclusion is not at all out of line with other similar studies.

There is ample evidence in the literature that higher levels of schooling are associated with personal benefits such as higher monetary incomes and with social benefits such as higher national and regional income as well as higher productivity growth. While it has been difficult to identify a statistically measurable relationship in an advanced society such as the United States, few would dispute the validity of the relationship.

In conclusion, we find ourselves in substantial agreement with the results of the Robison and Christophersen study on the Iowa community college districts. Investment in the Iowa community college system is sound from a number of perspectives. Expected lifetime earnings of the community college graduates are enhanced, the higher earnings contribute to higher state and local tax receipts, the colleges produce skilled workers who are likely to stay in Iowa, and their programs contribute to the economic, cultural, and social vitality of the local communities and state.